

Isaiah 62: 1-5 NIV

“Ever wanted to be called Beulah?”

“For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet, till her righteousness shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch. (2) The nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory; you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will bestow.(3) You will be a crown of splendor in the Lord's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

“(4) No longer will they call you Deserted, or name your land Desolate. But you will be called Hephzibah, and your land Beulah; for the LORD will take delight in you, and your land will be married.

(5) As a young man marries a maiden, so will your sons marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.”

This Isaiah reading barely makes sense to modern readers.

Its comparisons mean little.

Names like Hephziba and Beulah sound weird.

Hollywood created a few Beulahs.

Some of us recall hearing about Beulah, the maid on the 40s radio program, “Fibber McGee and Mollie.”

I did not know the following fact:

a white guy named Marlin Hurt voiced the character, Beulah.

Beulah barely ranks now as a girl’s name. **Would you want to answer to the name Beulah?¹**

There’s a snowball’s chance in the hot place that you’d name your daughter Hephzibah.

In Isaiah 62, two other strange sounding names were translated as “forsaken” and “desolate.”

Those names are Azubah and Shemamah. Even in this age of far-out names, you’ll likely not hear Hephziba, Azubah and Shemamah.

The names represent only a sampling of difficulties this text presents.

¹ According to the website babynameshub 14 U.S. girls born in 2015 received the name Beulah compared to 2,397 in 1916.

To fully understand everything in this passage takes “a heap of learnin,’” more knowledge than I’ll ever attain.

Yet we can understand the main point.

We clearly need it.

Even more than we need the money to pay next month’s bills.

We struggle early on with the fact.

And in midlife

And in old age

You deal with it.

Most of you have voiced it.

It is on everybody’s mind.

We are talking about belonging.

Everyone needs to fit in somewhere.

Your experience tells you that.

Few feelings compare to that of feeling excluded.

Not belonging.

All want to be a part of something.

That need in our DNA isn’t it?

I wish I had recognized that, especially when I was a young father.

In those days, we could not afford repairmen.

I’d be on my back trying to fix a sink.

Water everywhere; shirt and pants soaked.

Trying to loosen a fitting with cheap, worn out pliers or wrench.

Totally frustrated.

Or trying to repair the car.

Covered with grease.

It seems that I never had the correct tools.

At the moment of peak aggravation with a project, one of our toddling kids would peek in and innocently ask,

“Daddy, can I help?”

Their preacher dad would yell:

“Norma! Can you get this kid out of here so I can get something done?”

Kids wish to be a part, don’t they?

They want to belong.

So do old adults.

All of us yearn to be part of something.

Great stories often stress the theme loneliness- belonging theme.

Hans Christian Andersen’s *Ugly Duckling*

illustrates the universal need.

Norma loves to watch Hallmark Hall of Fame Christmas specials.

Nearly all share the belonging theme.

I found this story in a book entitled: *TIME’S UP* and read it to a group one Christmas Eve.²

“The first time I ever remember hating anyone was in the third grade. The kid’s name was **Les**. **Les** moved into town part way through the year and from the beginning we had trouble

“On the first day I received a note during spelling. The note read: After school you’re dead!” The note was signed, “Les.”

“This was not good news as Les stood about six feet tall and weighed in the area of 200 lbs. In the third grade!

Fortunately I had to stay a few minutes late after school that afternoon, and by the time I left, so had everyone else. I found several new paths home and managed to avoid Les for

over a week.

“Until the inevitable happened. I forgot. I walked out of school one afternoon and crossed the street toward home, when out from behind a bush stepped Les.

A huge crowd suddenly showed up. They all apparently knew what was going to happen and didn't want to miss it.

“Les took one step toward me and I took one step back. I negotiated. I asked why this was happening.

“Neither God nor Les would give me a reason. Les took another step toward me and I took another step back. I looked at the audience and smiled a smile that was supposed to say ‘I'm not worried,’ you know, to look cool.

“But the look in my eyes apparently blew the image and everyone laughed. Big old Les took another step toward me and I took another step back.

“And I tripped over the fire hydrant and fell backwards, rolling down the ditch next to the road, and landed in the mud.

² *TIME’S UP: Sermons for Advent Christmas And Epiphany*, by John B. Jamison. CSS Publishing Co.

“It was hilarious. At least that's what they all thought. Les hadn't laid a hand on me but had destroyed every ounce of pride, self-esteem and dignity in my body.

“Everybody laughed and went home, by way of Les' house where they all got ice cream first. Oh, how I hated that kid. She was the meanest woman I have ever met in my life!

“I sat there in the mud thinking that life couldn't be any worse. “I was wrong.

“Two weeks later, while my mother and I were planning my upcoming birthday party, she said, "Why don't you invite the new girl in your class to your party?"

“I gave every reason I could think of not to invite her, I even told the truth! But in the end I had to invite her. That's what I was told. So I did the only thing an honest, healthy third grader could do. I lied. I never invited Les to the party. I told Mom that Les was going out of town and couldn't come.

“It was a week after the party, which, by the way was one of the grandest events ever held

in Beardstown with the entire third grade class of Beard School attending (except for one), when I went with Mom to the store.

“We were walking down the cereal aisle when we met Les's mother. My mother said, "I'm so sorry Les missed the party." I prayed. Les's mom answered, "What party?" I prayed real hard. It didn't help.

I will spare you the details of our ride home, and the next few weeks of confinement, but just let me say that I have never hated anyone quite like I hated that third grade girl. I still occasionally have dreams of getting even [with Les.]”

**This story is about belonging isn't it—
from numerous angles?**

Little boys want to belong.

And 6'tall, 200lb, third grade girls need to feel like they belong.

**Some of the most meaningful moments in my life related to matters of belonging.
—not feeling a part of something.**

You probably know the lonely experience.

Hardly anyone wants to face some terrible truths about loneliness.

Many murderers were loners with no sense of belonging.

Private, secretive, alienated from even their families.

In fact they often first target family members.

All human beings need to feel the security of belonging.

That’s why our text is timely.

The people of Israel felt **Deserted and Desolate.**

Remember those two word-names Azubah and Shemamah?

Deserted and Alone?

Ever felt that way?

As if you didn’t belong to anyone or anything?

Isaiah tells us what causes that condition.

He also tells us the cure.

We can achieve that “Beulah” feeling—that sense of belonging.

Each year in my Bible reading, I start again in Genesis.

I’ve read it at least 60-70 times.

Genesis contains some really bizarre, but all-true narratives—rape, murder, kidnapping—just like today’s news

Next time you read Genesis note this connection.

Abnormal behavior usually came from people who felt like they didn’t belong

Examples occur throughout Genesis.

Let me share a few cases from chapter 25.

Isaac and Rebekah had twin sons.

You could hardly call Isaac and Rebekah a unified couple.

Though their sons Esau and Jacob were twins, they were opposites, not identical.

Esau was a hairy hunter, who loved the open country; he’d belong to the NRA.

Today he’d probably hunt antelope, moose, and mountain lions using helicopters and 4-wheelers.

Likely own assault rifles, knives, and night vision equipment.

Daddy Isaac favored hairy Esau.

Esau’s twin Jacob hung out at home.

He listened to Beethoven, Bach, Mozart, List, and Schubert on his I-tunes. On Saturday afternoons, he probably tuned to opera music.

Jacob likely baked gold flat cakes and watched the cooking channel.

Jacob belonged to momma Rebekah.

Those boys did not belong to a family.

One parent possessed each boy.

- Isaac controlled Esau.
- Rebekah manipulated Jacob.

This defines the first truth about belonging.

Real belonging can’t happen when one person controls another.

Some time back, a guy in his late forties asked to talk with me; his marriage was troubled.

In Casey’s parking lot, we talked in his pickup.

His wife had left him.

**Though I knew some of his kinfolk,
but I’d never met her or him.**

**As we talked about the break-up, I didn’t
hear what I hoped to hear from the fellow.**

He didn’t speak of devotion and love.

He pulled a photo from his pocket to show me.

The picture showed her in an alluring pose.

He spoke as though someone stole a beautiful possession from him.

It resembled someone describing a recently hijacked pickup.

The wife probably never felt the security of being loved and in the right place.

More like she was owned.

How could anyone blame her for wanting to leave?

He wanted to control her again, possess her, and show her off like a bowling trophy.

She felt no sense of belonging as a beloved person.

Real belonging relates to shared love and deep respect for others; it does not try to possess.

Second, let’s look at the story behind the story in our Isaiah text.

Along with the Ten Commandments, God gave Israel a plan for belonging.

Israel belonged to God.

“I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt.”

- **God created all of them.**
- **He also freed them from slavery.**
- **He proved everything they needed.**

Had they reflected on his treatment of them, they would have realized how much God loved them.

The truth should have impressed a strong sense of belonging in them.

21st century people resemble Israel.

“We don’t have time for God.”

“We’re too busy trying to make a go of life.”

“There’s too much to see and do.”

“Church is a waste of time.”

Now as then, few feel a sense of belonging.

As a result folks feel increasingly deserted and desolate.

They grow increasingly alienated from God and one another.

There’s only one way to really belong:

We change our life and our lifestyle to completely follow him.

We love him and others as he has loved us

First we make sure we’re not trying to control others.

Second, we appreciate Him, turn fully to God and stop disobeying Him.

Third, we serve others and give of ourselves.

In the mid-60s an army sergeant began attending the Hollywood church with his mother and aunt.

Fred never married.

Yet Fred loved kids.

Fred “adopted” many needy children.

He started college funds for young girls, who didn’t get much assistance in those days. Many of the young ladies were from a church sponsored orphan home in Tennessee.

We have no idea how many he helped but there must be scores of them.

We kept in touch with Fred.

For many years, Fred served at Arlington National Cemetery. When fallen military

personnel were buried, and there were no family members present, Fred received the flag on behalf of the families.

Fred maintained his faith in God and faithfully attended worship services.

Prior to his death, we always sent Fred our annual Christmas letter. Here is one reply:

“I got cards from some of my orphan home ‘kids.’ They have become my family and have blessed me over the year—more than I ever did them. Have been connected with one girl for 50 years. Now her daughter has two little girls, making me a great-grandpa. A job I truly love. They live in Gonzales, LA. They moved back to the mainland after years of living in Puerto Rico. Some of the ‘kids’ come to visit me now and then.”

To our knowledge Fred never felt desolate or deserted. You sense his joy in the Lord and his sense of belonging.

When Jesus returns to claim him and others who trust him, Fred will enjoy that “Beulah” married—belonging feeling.

On that day, Jesus will claim the church as his royal bride.

Are you part of the church that is his bride?

One last point about the Church and belonging from Romans 12:5:

“In Christ we who are many form one body and each member belongs to all the others.

Every one of you is important.

But no one is more important than any other.

If Christ died to save us all, all are of equal worth.

None more important than another.

Jesus died to save all; the same cost for each.

Here’s what results when we belong to Christ and to one another:

“No longer will they call you Deserted, or name your land Desolate. But you will be called Hephzibah, and your land Beulah; for the LORD will take delight in you . . .”

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